

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Genesee County Youth Bureau

Application ID: 14AC156054

Program Name: Genesee County AmeriCorps

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

Reviewers' Summary Comments:

Strengths:

Partial data is presented to state a case for need. The applicant shares medium income and population data for the area, which demonstrates low-income and rural locale. Data is also provided on ethnicity and race, which shows a largely white population. National and statewide data are presented to discuss obesity and correlated risk factors.

The most compelling data is a state DOH school survey that shows obesity and overweight levels for these three counties. Statewide data is given for physical activity levels required in state schools. Nutrition education regulations are reviewed per curriculum review, and volunteer levels are given through New York state volunteer percentages.

The applicant provides a compelling case for the need for targeted nutrition education and increased exercise for the children of Genesee, Orleans, and Wyoming counties. Childhood rates of obesity in each of the target areas exceed the national average of 17% with the rates of Genesee (22.5%), Orleans (18%), and Wyoming (19.9%).

Applicant provides data to document the population size, rural status, and median income for the three-county area served. The service area is primarily middle class and Anglo. Applicant cites school data for the State of New York to identify a significant disparity of need as it relates to the conditions of youth ages 10 to 17 that are either overweight or obese.

The applicant addresses a significant problem with students' access to physical education during the school week (for the targeted area). Students are only mandated to participate in 120 minutes of physical education weekly compared to the recommendation from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) of 300 minutes.

The applicant further substantiated the need for service by explaining that while the local schools are mandated to provide nutrition education, there is no recommended curriculum for those lessons. Students may or may not receive adequate training in making healthy choices.

The applicant presents a reasonable model for decreasing at risk health behaviors in children through increasing their physical activity and knowledge of nutrition. There is a logical link between the activities, the goals, and the expected outcomes.

The applicant's current and proposed Health Futures component, which will utilize 7.4 of the 10.4 member service years (MSY), uses established and evidence-based curriculum provided by the HHS and the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA). The applicant cites a study of a similar program (Taylor, 2008 and Am. J. of Clinical Nutrition, 2008) that provides evidence that a similar model has demonstrated effectiveness.

The applicant provides many suitable goals that can be measured through a pre/post design. For example, the short term goals for each of the proposed activities in the logic model will be measured through the participant's knowledge before and after participation in an activity.

The applicant accurately spells out the targeted population of youth, ages 6-17, and says that lessons will be developmentally appropriate for childhood obesity, nutrition education, and environmental education. They have accessed the nutritional education and physical activity guidelines from the USDA and HHS to develop their curriculum. The applicant knows the area and has worked in this area with youth, and has used AmeriCorps members in the past.

The applicant satisfactorily describes how they met or exceeded their goals in their youth development grant program including improved attitudes (68%) towards parents, peers, and school attendance.

The applicant successfully conducted a pilot program to test the viability of adding an environmental stewardship component to grant activities.

The applicant has been an AmeriCorps grantee since 2004, and has shown that it can impact youth in various educational programs, with 68% showing improved attitudes and 69% reporting gains in 2 developmental assets as a result of programming. 68% showed the ability to remember 3 environmental practices one year, and 55% the following year, in their environmental education programming.

The applicant has implemented an AmeriCorps Youth program, providing youth development services since 2004 and providing environmental education services during the past two years.

Weaknesses:

The method of collecting data on obesity was not clearly stated. The study by the State's Department of Education citing HHS data related to inadequate exercise programs in service area schools does not provide a date or a description of how HHS arrived at its findings. The same problem exists with USDA and HHS findings that schools provide an inadequate level of health education. A 2006 study (Louv) did not meet the standard of same or similar studies required for citations over six years old. The finding from the State of New York that schools' curriculum is too limited to properly address environmental education is inadequate because the year covered is not mentioned.

The citation for the finding that based on a survey, the State of New York ranks last in the nation in terms of the level

of volunteer participation does not provide the name of the author. There is no author cited for the survey (2010) that claims only 30% of youth in the service area have access to volunteer opportunities.

The applicant does not sufficiently address the need to include parents/guardians into the grant activities since they are the ones who will make many food choices for the students.

The applicant does not explain how the community values might impact the children's choices. For example, children often purchase school breakfast and lunch which does not always offer healthy choices.

It is not clear how many youth we are talking about. The local environmental education need is not clearly laid out.

The study cited to provide evidence of the effectiveness of the applicant's past and proposed environmental education services does not describe any finding that would support the effectiveness of the proposed environmental stewardship services.

Impact measures beyond acquiring knowledge in the areas of nutrition, fitness, and environmental issues are not presented. There are no tests to measure fitness. The applicant indicates that youth will be encouraged to enroll in the Presidential Active Lifestyle Award (PALA) Program that lasts 6 weeks and culminates in an award certificate. A measure of fitness outcome and achieving healthy eating goals would be the number or percentage of youth who obtained an award certificate; yet the only proposed activity, according to the logic model, is to "give youth the opportunity to enroll."

The applicant is proposing to provide assistance to agencies in order to increase their volunteers by helping improve agency capacity in the areas of technology, software, and social media. Member training related to this activity is not provided. Details of how members will assess and respond to capacity building needs of agencies are absent. Applicant does not explain how it will document increased volunteerism that can be attributed to capacity-building activities.

The applicant does not present a plan to educate the guardians/parents of the children in making healthy choices, nutrition, or increasing exercise. The applicant mentions in the logic model that children will be encouraged to discuss nutrition at home.

Some of the goals in the Theory of Change section are not clear. For example, the medium goal for environmental stewardship states that children will share information and adopt changes in their home. These are two separate goals and neither explains how they would meet the goal.

It is not clear why the applicant is not using a previously used, evidence-based curriculum, rather than developing a new curriculum for these programs. While the case is somewhat made for the need for environmental education, it does not appear integrated into the curriculum. The short-, medium- and long-term goals are all the same.

The applicant did not provide conclusive evidence that its environmental stewardship component has been effective in the past. The statement that the past environmental stewardship program resulted in participants learning "at least one thing" is too vague to understand the outcome produced.

This subject area (physical activity and nutritional education) appears to be a new area for this applicant. They will be developing their curriculum, so it is untested.